

***A Paradigm Shift
Towards Green Development
Ensures Sustainable Development***

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TOPIC:

“Upon Your Perception, does Green Development help ensure the Sustainable Development process?”

In my view, Green Development has not been accepted as the chief paradigm in development practices to the point where it can *ensure* the sustainable development process, although it is currently an influencing factor. Mainstream Sustainable Development (MSD) still maintains strong linkages to traditional modernization concepts and associated economic growth models, which tend to diminish Green Development as the dominant, standalone approach to development.

Currently, notions of Green Development are a point of departure and a hopeful way forward towards a system of development practice wherein **modernization-oriented approaches** will be systematically, via an internal paradigm shift in the perspective of development actors (versus external pressures, *see below*), relegated to a role which is secondary to **ecologically-oriented** practices.

1

A definition of Green Development is still elusive. I perceive “Green Development” to mean an approach to human development which is distinct from traditional notions and practices of Mainstream Sustainable Development (MSD). Mainstream Sustainable Development is currently still based on modernization as a way forward, i.e., with an emphasis first and foremost on modernization to drive growth—which will presumable lead to positive (beneficial) development.

Ulrich Beck, in his seminal work, *Risk Society*, makes the assertion that modernity contains a “break”, and that a gap exists between classical industrial society and a new kind of industrial society, where we are located today, which he terms a “Risk Society” (Beck, U., 1992 cited in Adams, WM, 2001). Beck states that the condition of risk society involves social, political, economic, and individual risks which exceed the monitoring and protective apparatus of classical industrial society.

In short: old ways of development, based on (and at times congruent with) growth via industrialization processes, still inhabit our new Risk Society and inform current approaches. The result, however, is **risk**—risk in the form of depletion of resources, in the form of the production of damaging industrial byproducts, and other manifestations..

Whereas such risks have previously existed in classical industrial eras, for example as seen in localized groups of radium dial workers in a particular plant in a particular location (Caufield, 1989, cited in Abrams, 2001) our current era of globalization enables rich nations’ to “buy their way out of risk”--by paying poorer nations to accept hazardous waste, for example.

Additionally, Adams (2001) clarifies this position by stating that “the advent of Risk Society may also be seen in the inadequacy of systems of democratic government to cope with increasingly technical and globalized systems of production.” (pg. 287)

The end result is a condition in which Green Development is not a necessary starting point for development, since the downsides of development (risk) can be avoided by those wealthier states that can purchase their way out of it. For example, the establishment of allowable Carbon sinks by the Kyoto protocol has led to the trading of Carbon credits, whereby nations which can afford to will “purchase” or underwrite the establishment of such sinks—usually via forestation—by another country. (Australian Foundation for Science, 2005) thereby avoiding risk via purchase.

To summarize: 1) the current Risk Society enjoys global exploitation of resources to drive economic growth 2) the current development trends still utilize an approach to modernization which may not be workable in today’s Risk Society 3) byproducts of economic growth in the global theater can be avoided by developed nations via their ability to “purchase their way out of risk” 4) Green Development, while an appropriate means to manage Risk Society, is currently still not entirely mainstream for various reasons (see below).

2

I assert that Green Development, a potential remedy or “bridge” for Beck’s Risk Society gap, requires a new way forward, a **new paradigm** which is not grounded in a classical modernization approach to growth and development. For Green Development (primarily concerned with ecological, environmental, and cultural sustainability) to become part of mainstream development practice, to ensure Sustainable Development, will require a complete and internally motivated **paradigm shift** away from economic driven modernization development models.

This paradigm shift, while showing itself in some key ways already (through “green consumerism”, for example) is not complete.

A paradigm shift is described in psychological terms to mean:

“when a significant change happens - usually from one fundamental view to a different view. In most cases, some type of major discontinuity occurs as well.” (Bailey-Lloyd, Carolanne, 2008)

Thomas Kuhn coined the term “Paradigm Shift” in his 1962 book, *The Structure of Scientific Solutions*. According to Kuhn, a paradigm shift “when scientists encounter anomalies which cannot be explained by the universally accepted [paradigm](#) within which scientific progress has thereto been made.” (Kuhn, 1962, cited in Wikipedia, 2008)

Although Kuhn had limited his description to the physical sciences, social scientists and economic theorists have examined the relevance of the paradigm shift to their fields. Applied to economics, Giovanni Dosi describes a paradigm shift to mean:

“the identification of new techno-economic paradigms as changes in technological systems that have a major influence on the behaviour of the entire economy...examples include the move to mass production, and the introduction of microelectronics.” (Uncredited, cited in Wikipedia, 2008)

I suggest that, in the field of development, a paradigm shift may describe the change from modernization-oriented economic practices to a fundamentally green, or ecologically-oriented approach: something that might handily lead development actors across Beck’s divide between risk societies and thereby “ensure” Sustainable Development.

In any case--as a paradigm--Green Development does not appear to have injected itself into the largest and more conservative development agencies that nonetheless impact the Mainstream Development process.

The challenges in achieving such a paradigm shift are significant, requiring, amongst other adjustments, a reform in the attitudes and perceptions of the normal (developmental) planning structure. A culture of adjustment within centralized, top-down agencies must be created, enforced, and voluntarily and internally adopted as a matter of course.

This is inherently contradictory to the economic imperatives and interests of many actors in the traditional or Mainstream Development process. Adams (2001) notes:

“Large bureaucracies are inherently conservative, and the “greening” of development is bizarre theoretically in the context of the established disciplines of development planning, troublesome in terms of policy, and highly inconvenient administratively.” (pg. 331)

Resistance to the paradigm shift towards Green Development comes from many directions: Economic and political dimensions of vast development projects must be handed off to classically disempowered stakeholders; valuation of natural assets must take on a real dimension, not equivalent to, but parallel with, Dollars and Euros; disempowered stakeholders must voluntarily be given their say via participation in the planning process; and simultaneously, foreign “experts” must be relieved of their infallibility to decide and undertake local projects through a process Beck describes as “demonopolization.”

Green Development as a practice is thus easier to dismiss than to “shoehorn” into formerly economic driven paradigms. So long as this continues, Green

Development may remain an alternative to Mainstream Sustainable Development.
as the system continually falls back upon its old patterns.

“The process of conception, design, and approval of major development projects is in practice highly complex, bureaucratic and often political. The increased visibility of the environmental aspects of project development...means that it is frequently also controversial” (Adams, pgs 321, 322)

Ultimately, as we are today finding with simultaneous (linked) petroleum and food crises, the resources of the Earth and the biosphere are limited. Unless Risk Society is dealt with, unless there is a universal paradigm shift towards green development, there will be a point eventually, for example an irreversible tipping point in the global warming process, where Beck’s Risk cannot be run from--no matter how speedily the state or actor may flee!

Green Development, as a matter of course, may be the holistically ideal (and possibly, only) choice to proceed with human development as we strive to span the gap between Beck’s risk-worlds. Although Green Development is beginning to enter the popular culture of development practice, and society Green cannot viable while the economic, modernization models of development are pursued.

An actual paradigm shift towards “green” practice, away from modernization and growth oriented development, needs to complete itself first and foremost.

3

Green Development is not currently embedded in the development process as the default approach or standard paradigm in development culture for a number of reasons.

As mentioned previously, Green Development is “highly inconvenient” administratively. (Adams, pg. 331) Secondly, it will “require new alliances, new ways of cutting through the conservatism of industry’s ingrained destructive practices and environmentalism’s knee jerk opposition”. (pg. 361)

But clearly Green Development practices need to further enter the culture of development thinking and practice to the point that any perceived threats to established bureaucratic practices are diminished--and also to adequately capture or engage members of the public who may unwittingly have some involvement in the development process (i.e., taxpayers or consumers) but who have not yet been awakened to their level of participation as such.

Green Development must fully detach from any marginal associations in order to be accepted by conservative development actors in order to ensure Sustainable Development. Insofar as development can be considered to be “a form of self-conscious or planned construction” (pg. 365) Green Development needs to be constructed as an acceptable way forward.

Significant inroads so far along these lines appear to be in instances where pressure is exerted on development actors from the outside, to the point that the actor is forced to acknowledge such pressure and then commence some degree of change.

The area of “green consumerism”, whereby environmental concerns on a development are linked to acceptance or rejection by consumers of a particular product, is one area which has seen success, and some skepticism as motives are examined as well.

Initially, pressure is exerted externally, via deliberate and carefully constructed campaigns organized by groups linking a negative environmental impact with a particular cause.

Hardwood garden furniture, for instance (made from tropical hardwoods in destructive fashion), was targeted by various environmental groups as a significant and specific product which was linked with the consumer at home.

These groups commenced protests against key purchasers of such products in the UK, which in turn spread awareness of the issue into the public, who in turn questioned—and resisted—purchasing such products to the point that the “green issue” became a liability impacting store revenues. (Adams, pg. 350)

However the linkage occurs, the end result is that the “green awareness” enters the pop culture lexicon of the purchasing public, stakeholders gain an awareness of the issues that need to be addressed, and the economies of business cause modification in behavior of the vendor.

Such reactive behavior is still connected to economic growth imperatives, i.e., profit or loss of the store selling the hardwood product. This is a Risk Society behavior which, though ultimately beneficial, still doesn’t embody the paradigm shift of true Green-ism. In other words: financial managers at the store are seeking to staunch a loss of revenue by adopting a beneficial branding strategy; they are still thinking and acting in terms of economy rather than ecology and sustainability.

4

But the question remains: does actual Green behavior and thinking exist in its own right, --as a thing in itself—or only as a mechanism to accommodate outside stakeholder requests, pressures, and behaviors? Is a paradigm shift towards Green Development realistic or even possible?

Adams maintains that it is. In fact, “there have been company directors and boards who have been persuaded of the moral imperative” to act in a way consistent with sustainable practices. (Adams, pg. 351)

Similarly, external pressures have been placed against key actors in development agencies themselves. The World Bank, for example, experienced significant sustained pressure from environmental groups, and as a result, implemented several new “green” policies in the 1990s. (Pg 332) Protests against dams and other large development projects have become increasingly widespread and associated with wider social movements.

In other words, “green” external pressure is effective in compelling key development actors to examine their practices in terms of Sustainability, and sometimes with the result of modifying formerly modernist, economic approaches to development.

Is it possible that consistent, sustained external pressure to change paradigms in development actors can actually succeed?

Apparently so, as Adams and other have pointed out. But certainly green approaches, when mandated from the outside are not always successful. Very often, green principles are undertaken only “on paper”, to fulfill the *letter* of Green

principles without actually extending any *real effort* (which equals cost) towards upholding them. Along these lines, Beck notes (regarding underpaid insecticide sprayers in developing countries):

“Management can issue safety instructions, knowing they will be unenforceable, and insist they be obeyed. This way they keep their hands clean...” (Beck, 1992 cited in Adams, pg 305)

Similarly, the *New York Times* notes that the notion we can “shop” or “consume” our way into sustainability is unsustainable, to say the least. Such behavior is fundamentally un-shifted from one paradigm to another, at least in terms of pop-culture, consumerist behavior:

“Paul Hawken, an author and longtime environmental activist, said the current boom in earth-friendly products offers a false promise. “Green consumerism is an oxymoronic phrase,” he said. He blamed the news media and marketers for turning environmentalism into fashion and distracting from serious issues.” (Williams, 2007)

Undertaking green development where it may run contrary to economic principles, but in the ultimate support of an ecological mission, requires what may be considered the equivalent of political will on the part of key stakeholders in the decision making process: in other words, their “paradigm” must have already been shifted, away from economic growth-oriented thinking, towards a perspective rooted in a bona fide way in ecological concern.

Along these lines, Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA), when properly conducted as part of a bona fide green approach, can be time consuming and costly. They are, as a result, often conducted “only as an afterthought” (Adams, pg 312) in a halfhearted attempt to uphold principles of sustainability.

Usher (Usher, 1997, cited in Adams pg 327) notes that “environmental and social issues are obstructions to the process within the aid bureaucracy to ‘push development projects through the pipeline’ ”.

Discussing Beck’s stages of Risk Society, Adams asserts that “mainstream sustainable development lies within the first of these [Risk] phases, the attempt to control or steer economic change without transforming patterns of social organization.” (Adams, pg. 311)

What organizationally transforming patterns is Beck alluding to? Beck is referring to the traditional, top-down, hierarchical approaches to development, which need undergo transformation towards “bottom-up” principles.

In other words, the engagement of individuals on the local level in planning, assessment, and other stages, is not only a signature of the green development model, but is evidence of a paradigm shift: the transformation from “top-down” to “bottom-up” organizational models is a function of the overarching, internal paradigm shift towards green development behavior and thinking...which in turn, when complete, would ensure Sustainable Development.

External pressures will only go so far in changing the fundamental operating patterns of an organization. “There is often a wide gap between ‘the increasingly alert concern of individuals and the official response of most institutions’.” (Stein and Johnson, 1979, pg 133, cited in Adams, pg 327) Nonetheless, some large organizations, including the World bank have gone some way towards including “green” approaches into its banking principles in an attempt to modify its mentality. Whether the World Bank’s paradigm has actually shifted has yet to be seen, but the first step is to become aware of the new paradigm, which seems to have been accomplished to a degree.

Even so, as in the case of the World Bank, which implemented evaluation procedures in the 1970's to oversee project design in an environmental dimension, many of these newly introduced green principles had "little influence on project design." (Adams, pg. 326)

Essentially in each of these instances, where green development principles are adopted but then marginally followed, we are witnessing the throes of an "old school" [first Risk Stage] behavior pattern or paradigm running into conflict with a "new school" Green Development paradigm. Until the paradigm has actually shifted, *Confusion, dispersal of energy and resources, inefficiency, and half-measures will result.*

5

Ultimately, I perceive that Green Development principles best support a sustainable development process when there is *bona fide interest* on the part of the organization or actor to implement green principals, **via an actual paradigm shift** towards green development approaches--*without* simultaneously attempting to pursue a modernist agenda.

In other words, there can only be one "script", one mission, one paradigm for the organization or actor to follow. I assert that such a paradigm shift, towards green development, is not compatible with a traditional modernization-based approach to development. Once achieved, however, the paradigm shift towards Green Development will, as a function, ensure Sustainable Development.

(There must also be the political will—or its handy equivalent, via effective external pressures—to undertake development according to a new paradigm.)

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